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The Monroe Doctrine

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ABOUT twenty-five years ago, as the Venezuelan boundary question was looming large on the horizon, a man then eminent in the business world asked me to tell him in five minutes what the Monroe Doctrine meant. He explained that he made his inquiry in that precise form because he had just five minutes to give to the subject, and no more. I promptly replied that I probably could answer his question more effectively in five seconds than I could in five minutes, since, if I really began to talk on the subject, I might consume five hours; but that I would at once say, without further loss of time, that the Monroe Doctrine meant "America for the Americans." Perhaps I also added that this sententious phrase was to be interpreted in a political and not in an economic sense.

The so-called doctrine enunciated by Monroe was a rule of policy growing out of the fundamental principles which the founders of the government of the United States laid down for the guidance of its foreign policy. The first of these principles was that of non-intervention in the political affairs of other governments and particularly of the governments of Europe. John Adams, while engaged in negotiating the treaty that acknowledged our independence, recorded in his diary that Mr. Oswald, the British commissioner, rather taunted him one day with being "afraid of being made the tools of the powers of Europe." Adams bluntly answered, "Indeed I am." "What powers?" asked Oswald. "All of them," declared Adams, and in explanation added:

It is obvious that all the powers of Europe will be continually maneuvering with us to work us into their real or imaginary balances of power. They will all wish to make of us a make-weight candle, when they are weighing out their pounds. Indeed, it is not surprising; for we shall very often, if not always, be able to turn the scale. But I think it ought to be our rule not to meddle.

Of all the sages of the American Revolution, John Adams, with the single exception of Benjamin Franklin, had the most comprehensive diplomatic experience. The prophetic words above quoted were uttered in 1782. More than a quarter of a century later, Adams, in his *Patriot Letters*, reaffirmed the principle which he had expounded to Oswald. Speaking of the "public negotiations and secret intrigues" which the principal powers, and particularly the English and the French, had, as he said, for centuries employed in every court and country of Europe to influence and sway the course of governments, he declared that, so long as they might hope to seduce the United States to engage in their conflicts, the country would be "torn and convulsed by their maneuvers"; and, with the wreck of the French alliance still fresh in his mind, he further declared that the United States should make no treaties of alliance with any European power but should separate itself so far as possible and so long as possible from all European politics and wars.

Washington, in his Farewell Address, and Jefferson, in various utterances, official and unofficial, enjoined upon their fellow-countrymen the observance of the same rule. But these

injunctions were but the solemn testamentary affirmations, by the chief builder of American independence and the author of its Declaration, of their profound conviction that abstention from interference in European politics was the very life of the American system of non-intervention and neutrality, the foundations of which they felt that they had, as President and as Secretary of State, in 1793, securely laid.

Monroe's famous declaration, which was directly occasioned by a movement on the part of a league of European powers called the Holy Alliance, to extend its activities to the Western Hemisphere, was conceived to be justified by the then firmly established American policy of non-interference in the affairs of Europe. "Our first and fundamental maxim," said Jefferson, "should be never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe; our second, never to suffer Europe to intermeddle with cis-Atlantic affairs." These rules were understood to be not only correlative but interdependent.

The Monroe Doctrine was announced by the United States as a rule of policy, and not as an international understanding. The European powers were not asked to agree to it. Had it been incorporated in a treaty, the terms of the agreement evidently would have been to the effect that, in consideration of the abstention of the United States from interference in the politics of Europe, the powers of Europe would engage to abstain from interference in the politics of America. But it was never protocolized. The fact that on certain occasions, such as that of the signing of the Hague Conventions, the United States has made the Monroe Doctrine the subject of a reservation, merely denotes that the United States in becoming a party to certain non-political engagements, has done so with the express understand-

ing that it was not to be regarded as having yielded its traditional policy and that the engagements were not to be interpreted as having that effect.

Among the many vague and indefinite suggestions to which the excitements of the past few years have given rise, none is more elusive than the proposal to extend the Monroe Doctrine to the world. In only one sense can this phrase have any meaning whatsoever. John Quincy Adams, in his musings on the Monroe Doctrine, speaks, in his diary, of the right of the independent countries of America to work out their political destiny in their own way. Had Adams been proposing generally to safeguard the rights of all nations, and not simply to safeguard the Americas against threatened old-world aggression, this might have been taken as an affirmation of the general right of national self-determination. But to say that the United States, because it undertook to safeguard the Americas, should, either singly or in combination with other powers, undertake to secure the enjoyment of the right of self-determination to all nations, including those of Europe, would be not only to pervert Adam's meaning but to discard the Monroe Doctrine altogether and to substitute for an American policy a world policy.

Nor is the fact to be overlooked that the Monroe Doctrine never was regarded by its authors as guaranteeing the independence and sovereignty of American nations as among themselves. On the contrary, the principle of non-intervention and neutrality, in association with the principle of the legal equality of independent states was proclaimed and practiced by the United States as furnishing its rule of conduct in its relations with other independent American countries as well as with the rest of the world. This, again, serves but to demonstrate that no matter

how we turn, reciprocal non-interference by Europe and America in each other's politics was accepted as the distinctive and vital essence of the Monroe Doctrine.

Of the observance of the Monroe Doctrine, one of the results has been the growth of an American system, the central thought of which is expressed by the word Pan-Americanism. What we call Pan-Americanism is the outgrowth of the conception that there is such a thing as an American system, and that this system is independent of and different from the European system. In this relation I ventured to say, in a work published before the idea of a world-league had come to occupy an appreciable place in the public mind, that to the extent to which Europe should become implicated in American politics and America should become implicated in European politics, this distinction would necessarily be broken down and the foundations of the American system impaired; and that "to the extent to which the

foundations of the American system were impaired, Pan-Americanism would lose its vitality and the Monroe Doctrine its accustomed and tangible meaning."

I have seen no occasion to modify these statements, which may, I think, fairly be regarded as truisms. The question whether the United States should continue to adhere to the Monroe Doctrine or should abandon it in favor of some other policy, is, like other political questions, a legitimate subject of discussion. But it is desirable that the discussion should be conducted with a frank recognition and intelligent appreciation of the fact that the Monroe Doctrine is distinctively American both in its origin and in the sphere of its operation; that non-interference in European politics was and has continued to be its source, inspiration and justification; and that the title can not be applied to policies involving participation in world-politics without discarding its actual and distinctive meaning and perverting it to fanciful uses in unknown realms.

The Monroe Doctrine and American Participation in European Affairs

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THE influence upon the Monroe Doctrine by this country's participation in European and world affairs involves that secondary phase of the doctrine which assumes that if we ask non-American powers to keep out of America, we must ourselves keep hands off in other parts of the world. The implication seems upon first thought to be a reasonable one. More careful consideration, however, very soon reveals the fact that the problem is by no means simple; that our attitude on

the subject is dependent, first, on our interpretation of the doctrine, and second, upon the character or nature of our participation.

EXPANSION OF THE DOCTRINE

As everyone knows, the Monroe Doctrine has been considerably developed and expanded since it was first promulgated. It began with the enunciation of the policy, "that the American continents are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future pow-